

THE UNIVERSITY OF READING

STAFFING COMMITTEE

23/07 A meeting of the Staffing Committee was held on Wednesday 19 July 2023 at 2.00 pm via Microsoft Teams

Present:

Dr R J Messer (Chair)
Professor A Charlton-Perez
Dr K Henderson
Mr S Hunt
Dr A Laville
Professor T Reid
Mrs C Rolstone
Mrs J Rowe
Mrs S Thornton

Mr A J Twyford (Secretary)

Also in attendance:

Mrs N Johnson, HR Advisory Lead
Miss R Thorns, HR Partner
Mr M Adams, Leadership and Talent Development Manager
Miss C Roalf, People Development Manager

Apologies were received from Mr S Allen and Professor F Hwang.

The Committee welcomed Professor Reid to her first meeting, and noted that Dr Henderson's membership of the Committee had been confirmed for a further three years.

23/08 The minutes of the meeting held on 7 February 2023 were approved.

Arising from the minutes:

Minute 23/02 (22/19 22/14): HR System

The Assistant Director of Human Resources (People and Talent) provided the Committee with an update on the progress made with re-tendering the University's HR system (Trent). She confirmed that the new provider is NTT Business Solutions and the new system is SAP.

She confirmed that the build process for the final product was almost complete, and the priority was to ensure the new payroll system was fully tested. She explained that three parallel pay runs alongside the normal pay run will take place in August, September and October with a go live date for the payroll and core system scheduled for November 2023.

She stated the go live dates for the Learning Management System (LMS) and the Applicant Tracking System (ATS) would not take place until 2024, and over seventy “champions” had been identified. The champions will have access to the development part of the system and will engage with other users and test out the system.

The Committee thanked the Assistant Director of Human Resources (People and Talent) for the update.

23/09 Staff Learning Development activity

Marc Adams, Leadership and Talent Development Manager and Carly Roalf, People Development Manager presented a paper to the Committee in relation to staff learning and development. A summary of the main points highlighted is below:

- The focus for the 2022/23 Open Programme was personal and professional growth, designed around the vision and ambitions of the University strategy;
- Reaching out to staff and having visibility throughout the University has been a challenge – People Development have put in place a number of methods to improve communication more widely and advertise what development support is available, including:
 - Working closely with Internal Communications, ensuring that Open Programme courses are advertised on the Staff Portal;
 - Posters and flyers were created and distributed to staff areas around the campus;
 - The Learning & Development Opportunities guide was created as a tool for colleagues to use as a quick reference.
- The Leadership & Management Development programmes are underpinned by the 3Rs and are designed to support delivery of the University’s strategy and distributed leadership model. These programmes are delivered by a combination of external trainers and internal experts;
- Feedback – People Development have introduced a standardised feedback survey that has been used across all Open Programme sessions.

The Committee made the following comments:

- The Open Programme provides a comprehensive suite of learning & development offerings on a limited budget and should be congratulated;

- There is a tendency for managers and staff to take for granted the extensive suite of learning & development activities on offer - should more be done to encourage staff to utilise the University's Open Programme and undertake volunteering;
- Continuous Professional Development (CPD) is a requirement of the Fellowship of the Higher Education Academy (FHEA) and the University's Open Programme offers sessions that would be useful CPD activities for academic colleagues;
- Can we capture and share "good practice" examples of how colleagues have utilised the internal leadership and management development programmes as part of their own leadership development;
- It would be useful to align training opportunities against a particular grade / job family;
- Has People Development considered introducing a charge for non-attendees to discourage delegates from dropping out of a session;
- How do you measure the effectiveness of the training.

The Committee thanked the Leadership and Talent Manager and People Development Manager for their presentation.

23/10 Review of the Reward Committee process

Before the Committee considered the paper in relation to a review of the reward Committee process, the Director of Human Resources explained that a decision had been taken by UEB that some of the University pay review and reward processes (including the Reward committees) would not run next year (2023/24). She confirmed that a communication would be sent to Heads of School / Function and the wider University community shortly.

Rachel Thorns, HR Partner explained that in 2022 the Staffing Committee had discussed the relative merits and limitations of the current Reward Committee arrangements and agreed that a review of the process was a sensible way forward.

She informed the Committee that a working group was established comprising 11 Heads of School / Function with representations from all Reward Committees (except HBS). The current arrangements were discussed and the existing guidance and associated documentation reviewed.

The working group made four proposals, and the Committee discussed each one in turn.

Proposal 1: removal of the current Committee structure and development of decision-making accountability to individual Heads of School and Heads of Function

She explained that this proposal was in line with the principles of the distributed leadership approach. The Committee discussed whether this proposal would lose some of the independent oversight as currently decisions are made by a Committee.

The Committee agreed that the new process must be consistently interpreted and implemented, including ensuring a consistency of approach in decision making. It was also noted that the HR Partner would play an important role in ensuring consistency and robustly challenging decisions where necessary.

The Committee were informed that the proposal included an *annual validation process*, led by the HR Function, to review decisions made each year. The validation process would notice trends and identify possible bias in decision making or implementation of the process.

The Committee discussed the proposed discretion afforded to Heads of School / Function in determining who else may be involved in the decision making process. They agreed that whilst it was not advisable for decisions to be made solely by the Head of School / Function, the process shouldn't be too prescriptive. The Committee agreed that it would be reasonable to propose a minimum number of managers to assist the relevant Head in considering cases and making decisions.

The Committee also noted that the proposals were developed in advance of the details of the Directorates model and would need to be adapted accordingly.

Proposal 2: Improve the process and clarity of criteria relating to Grade 6-7 Research staff merit-based promotions and identify alternative career development pathways/routes for progression (promotion) for other staff

It is proposed that the relevant Head of School should be accountable for the decision making for Grade 6-7 Research Staff merit-based promotion cases. The view of the working group was that the process and promotion criteria needed to be clearer and further developed.

The Committee supported the views of the working group that it was not deemed appropriate to include Grade 6 Research Staff as part of the Personal Titles Procedure given the procedure is only applicable to Academic staff Grade 7 or above.

The Committee discussed the working group's proposal that the Reward Committee process no longer consider merit-based promotion cases for all other staff groups (Professional & Managerial, Technical and Administrative Support staff), as this process is not well used / understood and the current process makes it difficult to assess the relative merits of a case for this staff group. It was agreed that the focus should be on developing alternative career pathway/progression options for these staff.

It was noted that HR is currently working on a development / career pathways framework that will identify good practice for Professional Services staff, and has been running focus groups specifically in relation to career progression for this staff group. The Director of Human Resources said the intention was to discuss this further at a future Committee once this project had concluded.

The Committee noted that whilst there is a process for Grade 6 Research Staff to be considered for merit-based promotion to Grade 7, there is no process for Grade 6 teaching staff (Associate Lecturers). They recognised that it was appropriate for Grade 6 Research Staff to have the opportunity to apply for promotion to Grade 7 in line with the Research Concordat.

Proposal 3: make decisions on consolidated pay increases and G6-7 Research Staff merit-based promotion cases once a year (during the Spring term)

The Committee agreed that making decisions once a year instead of twice a year was sensible and broadly supported. The Committee was less concerned about when the decision was taken.

Proposal 4: revise and update the Rewarding Excellence Procedures document and application form and move this online

The Committee approved this proposal, and made the following suggestions:

Lump sum payments – currently relevant Heads can approve awards from between £250 - £1500 (or more with approval from the Director of Human Resources). Could consideration be given to break down awards into bands e.g. £250 - £500, £501 - £1000 etc;

Staff should be reminded that they receive automatic increments (unless on the top of a grade) if they are on Grades 1 – 8;

The Committee thanked the HR Partner for presenting the paper and indicated their broad support for the recommendations put forward by the working group. It was agreed that she would feedback their comments to the working group and would work with HR and other relevant colleagues to devise a new process for rewarding staff.

23/11 Review of SMART Working policy

Alan Twyford, HR Partner presented a paper summarising the main findings following a review of the SMART working arrangements carried out by members of the HR function in 2023. He informed the Committee that feedback had been sought from Heads of School and Function, from the UCU and Staff Forum and from two of the University's networks – staff disability and parent & family.

He reported that the feedback continues to be positive with staff and managers welcoming the flexibility the SMART working arrangements affords, and highlighting a number of benefits (including staff motivation and wellbeing and recruitment and retention).

He noted that some Schools and Functions were not keeping to the University's stated expectations that colleagues *will spend on average the majority of their working time working from their workplace*. However, he said there was general acceptance and support that these local variations were appropriate and reflected the different needs and requirements of a particular School / Function.

He explained that some of the feedback received in 2022 was still applicable in 2023. For example, issues with infrastructure and room set up on campus, access to equipment and the difficulties experienced when holding a Teams meeting in an open plan office. He also reported that some of the feedback acknowledged that the campus is now less vibrant when compared to pre-covid times.

Given these findings, the recommendation to the Committee was not to make any changes to the policy or the associated guidance, and not to make any changes to the University's stated expectations.

The Committee discussed the paper and considered whether the University's stated expectations that colleagues *will spend on average the majority of their working time working from their workplace* should be removed or changed.

The Committee recognised the widespread support for the SMART Working policy and the benefits for staff of being able to work more flexibly. However, they noted the feedback from some Heads who acknowledged that the campus is now less vibrant when compared to pre-covid times, and discussed the potential impact the SMART Working arrangements were having on the student experience and on teaching availability and timetabling.

It was pointed out that the policy and guidance makes it clear that relevant Heads are responsible for setting expectations for their area and balancing the requirements of their service and the wider University with the individual preferences and circumstances of their teams. It was acknowledged that Schools and Functions will have their own cultures and approaches and this will be a contributing factor in determining how SMART working will be implemented in their area.

It was agreed that Human Resources would take the comments away and reflect on whether further changes are required to the policy and guidance. This will include a discussion with Student Services and Teaching & Learning colleagues to determine if and how the new ways of working were impacting on the student experience.

23/12 Performance Management procedure

The HR Advisory Lead went through the proposed amendments to the performance management procedure as detailed in the schedule of amendments document. She highlighted some of the changes, namely:

- Expansion of the informal action taken when identifying performance issues;
- A re-working of the formal process to include the need to set out the management case.

She explained that following the submission of her paper to the Staffing Committee the UCU had proposed some changes to the procedure and discussions are ongoing.

The Committee welcomed the proposed changes and noted that discussions with the UCU were still taking place. It was agreed that the HR Advisory Lead would provide the Committee with a further update once her discussions with the UCU had concluded.

23/13 Exit Interviews

The Assistant Director of Human Resources (People and Talent) informed the Committee that a leavers' questionnaire was introduced in January 2021.

She informed the Committee that since January 2021, 1,728 colleagues had left the University with 303 choosing to complete the exit questionnaire.

She provided the Committee with a summary of the data collected:

- The top three reasons for leaving were:
 - Going to a new role at a higher level elsewhere;
 - Wanted a change;
 - Lack of career progression;
- Many leavers highlighted working with their colleagues as a positive aspect;
- Small numbers of negative views included dissatisfaction with workload, sometimes reflecting on inequity with others, sometimes around not enough resources, including staff, to manage the work;
- For remuneration and benefits, comments were mainly about pay being low and/or worse than other sectors;
- Overall the comments relating to induction, work environment, communications, our commitment to D&I and senior management remain high except for communications and listening which have dropped slightly in the last 6 months;

- Line management scores were generally high.

The Committee thanked the Assistant Director of Human Resources (People and Talent) for the report and asked that the Committee continued to receive annual updates.

23/14 Pay and Pensions update

The Director of Human Resources reported that across the HE sector a number of other Universities were having to deal with marking and assessment boycotts by members of the UCU.

She confirmed that the University continued to explore contingency plans should Reading UCU agree to take action short of a strike (ASOS) include a marking and assessment boycott in the future.

She reported that the Universities and Colleges Employers Association (UCEA) continued to talk with the UCU and the other joint HE trade unions to explore obstacles to resuming negotiations and bringing an end to the boycotts.

She reported that a number of other HEI's had deferred this year's pay award.

23/15 Future meetings

The University Secretary sought the views of the Committee on whether future meetings should be in person, via Teams or hybrid. The Committee agreed that for 2023/24 the meetings should be either in person or via Teams.

23/16 Dates of meetings for the 2023/24 Academic Session:

Thursday 5 October 2023	2.00 pm to 4.00 pm
Tuesday 21 November 2023	10.00 am to 12.00 pm (reserve)
Tuesday 6 February 2024	2.00 pm to 4.00 pm
Wednesday 24 April 2024	11.30 am to 1.30 pm (reserve)
Wednesday 12 June 2024	2.00 pm to 4.00 pm